

# He's Ready. Are You?

## 10 Tips for Surviving and Thriving During Back-to-School Time

### **Update your contacts and materials**

From the media, key communicators, committee members, PTA groups, school employees and your school PR chums, make sure you have the most current information .... not just on paper, but programmed into your phone and email address books. (Also, update all district materials, information sheets, brochures, websites, etc.)

### **Make your plan useful**

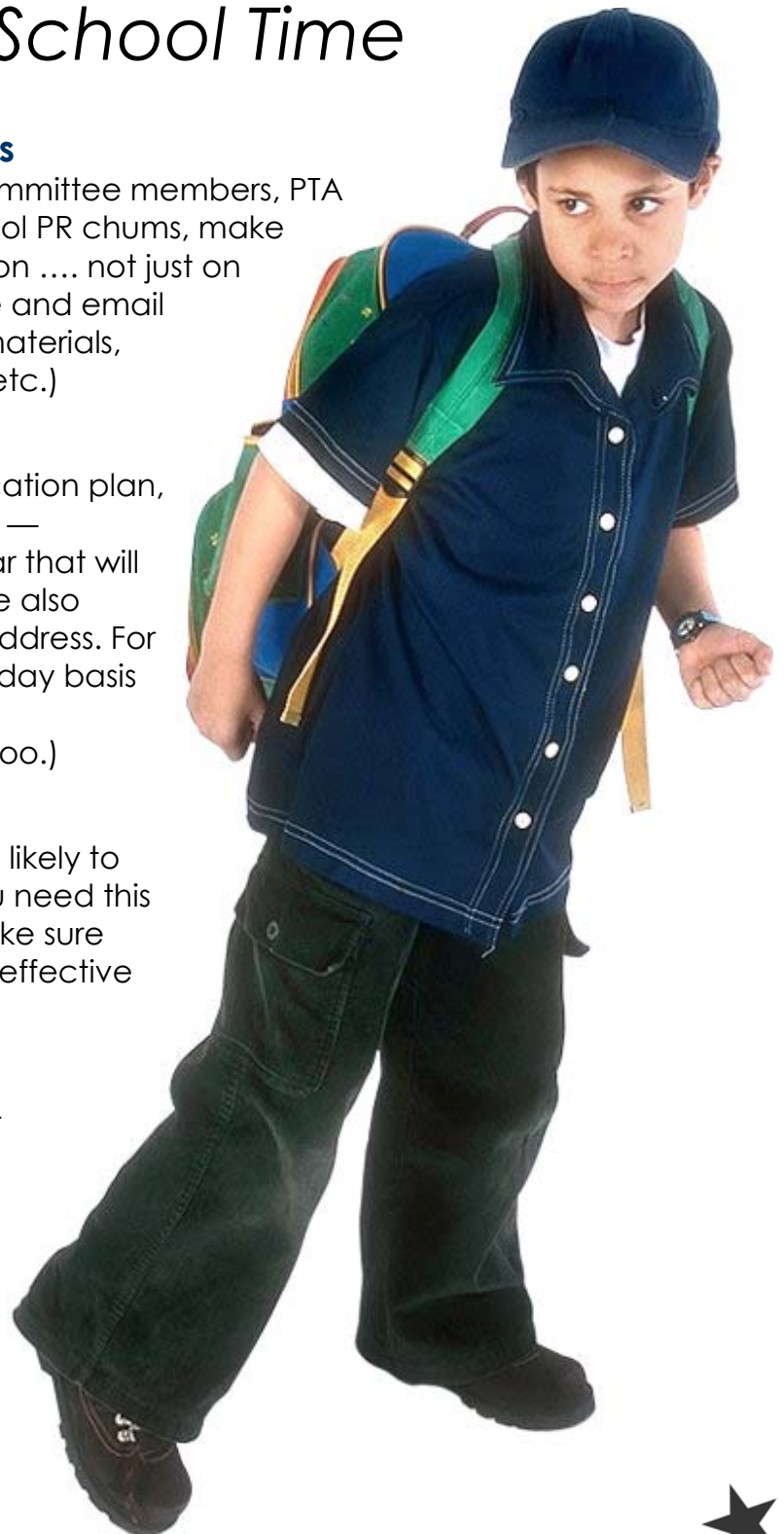
By now, you've updated your communication plan, including relative timelines. Put your tasks — publications, events, etc — on a calendar that will reflect your to-do list for each week, while also noting the key messages that each will address. For me, this is more user friendly on a day-to-day basis than the plan itself. (Don't forget to update your crisis communication plan, too.)

### **Out with the old, In with the new**

If it didn't produce results last year, its not likely to be the dynamic communication tool you need this year. Review your updated plan and make sure that you have discarded or revamped ineffective strategies.

### **Meet the staff**

Make it to every staff meeting possible — substitute meeting, new employee orientation, grade-level meetings, etc — to remind new and old employees alike what a great place your district is to work and learn. Present the *Top 10 Reasons that (District) is the Best!*, featuring measurable accomplishments. Then ask them to share it with others. (Also, give out freebies ... they love that!)



## **Make it simple for others and better for yourself**

You know the things we wish all teachers and principals would do — outstanding back-to-school night presentations, regular communication with parents and effective conferences. Do the work for them! Send them electronic templates that are easy to personalize. This will ease their workload and gives them confidence that they are on the right track. (NSPRA's *Making Parent Communication Effective & Easy: Communication Guidebook for Teachers and Their Schools* is a great resource.)

## **Provide a one-stop shop**

A back-to-school webpage or website is the perfect way to give parents and students one place to find all the news they can use about the coming semester. Be sure to include immunization charts, calendars, school supplies, bus routes and more in printable versions that will be easy for them to post on their refrigerator or other high traffic area. (District points of pride can even be added to the “keeper” items.)

## **Plan professional development for staff**

You don't have to cram it into the first two weeks of school, but plan to provide communication-related workshops for your staff. Customer service, parent involvement, volunteer recruitment and more, share your best practices with them so they can be applied at the building-level. Schedule the dates early so they can mark their calendars.

## **Toot your own horn**

Remind your colleagues how you help to make the district a great place. Distribute information about the services your department provides to the staff, students, parents and community. Let them know you are here to assist them and to build support so they can focus on their most important job — educating children.

## **Be seen and heard**

Take time to visit the buildings as teachers return to prepare their classrooms. Many will begin showing up days before their contract actually starts. Lean your head in and let them know you are looking forward to an outstanding year. Also, visit your business partners and let them know you're gearing up for the fall. Ask them to put school-friendly messages on their marquees. Then, hit the radio stations and tape PSAs featuring school-related tips that will be helpful for families.

## **Develop a “Media Opportunities” list**

Provide members of the media with a list of back-to-school story ideas, remembering your key messages for the coming year. Then, develop a monthly list of ideas to be sent to local photographers and reporters. Not every pitch will make, but on a slow news day, they will surprise you!

## **From my favorite cartoon strip (sent to me by my friend Ken Koch):**

**One child to another:** You know, all during the school year I think about summer, but in the summer, I hardly think about school at all.

**The friend responds:** If you ask me, the school could use a better publicist.

**Moral of the story:** Make the most of late July and August. When it comes to low-effort, inexpensive and positive publicity, you won't see the likes of it again for another 12 months! Use it meaningfully and effectively. Every word and every dollar counts.